

January 26, 2021

Christopher Pietruszkiewicz, President  
Michael Austin, Provost and Executive Vice President for Academic Affairs  
Linda White, Chair, Board of Trustees  
University of Evansville  
1800 Lincoln Ave.  
Evansville, IN 47722

Dear President Pietruszkiewicz, Dr. Austin, and Ms. White:

The American Historical Association expresses grave concern about the draft plan for realigning academic departments and programs announced by the University of Evansville on December 10, 2020. We note especially the proposed removal of the major in history and the termination of two tenured history professors. Reducing history's presence at UE will severely diminish the ability of our colleagues to maintain the pedagogical and research standards that we consider essential to teaching and scholarship. We note also the many deep connections between the UE history department and the Evansville community, including service on many committees and nonprofit governing boards related to the study and communication of history. The AHA urges the university to consider the educational and community impacts of this short-sighted plan for realignment, which will serve to weaken the preparation of your students for the global citizenship imperative to economic and civic accomplishment, as well as the lifelong learning essential to professional success.

Cutting a core liberal arts degree like history is an especially odd move at a time when civic leaders from all corners of the political landscape have lamented the level of historical knowledge of American citizens. Further, there is overwhelming evidence that shows employers seek the kind of skills a history degree can provide. As the AHA said in a recent statement, "to eliminate or decimate a history department is a lose-lose proposition: it deprives students of essential learning and skills, even as it strips institutions of the essential perspectives and intellectual resources so necessary to confront the present and shape the future."

This ill-considered plan not only diminishes the quality of a University of Evansville degree; it also identifies the university with employment practices that have no place in American higher education. The university is seeking to terminate two tenured members of the faculty without adhering to its own contractual Faculty Handbook and in apparent violation of American Association of University Professors guidelines, not to mention generally accepted ethical guidelines—an especially striking embarrassment for an institution whose stated values emphasize "a culture of trust."

The AHA is America's largest and most prominent organization of professional historians, with over 11,000 members engaged in the teaching and practice of history at colleges and universities, secondary schools, historical institutes, museums, and other institutions. The AHA offers particular resources to our department chairs because of their central role in promoting and nourishing teaching, learning, and

research in history. UE's history chair has had access to the AHA's online community of department chairs, a particularly active group that enables sharing of data, problem-solving, and conversation about issues ranging from logistics to curriculum.

We certainly understand the pressure of budgets, and do not underestimate the financial necessities you confront at this particular moment. This realignment plan, however, will have serious and deleterious consequences for the practice of history and hence the quality of undergraduate education at the University of Evansville. Once programs are eliminated or truncated, they are often exceedingly difficult and expensive to reconstitute. What might be suggested as a temporary solution to an immediate crisis often becomes a long-term problem.

The AHA is aware that the UE history department has been discussing imaginative and constructive approaches to the history major given the current situation (as historians we are always sensitive to context). We hope that the university's decision-making process will take these ideas seriously, and reconsider hasty initial inclinations.

Sincerely,



James Grossman  
Executive Director



Jacqueline Jones  
AHA President, 2021